

## **Downtown Great Barrington Cultural District Minutes of July 15, 2021**

This meeting was conducted by remote participation (video/teleconference) as stated on the agenda.

Members in Attendance: Ed Abrahams, Betsy Andrus, Jeff Caminiti, Kris Kanter, Seth Keyes, Richard Le, Talya Leodari, Barbara Watkins, Neel Webber, Karin Watkins, Jeff Gagnon, Abi Rollins, Robin Helfand

Also Attending: Chris Rembold (Town of GB), Laura Brennan (BRPC), Wylie Goodman (BRPC), Madison Biasin (Town of GB-Intern)

Not Present: Tate Coleman, Sally Michael Keyes

**The meeting was called to order by Karin W. at 9:04 a.m.**

**May 20<sup>th</sup> Minutes** – Karin W. noted that the group had not approved the minutes from the May 20<sup>th</sup> meeting in June because the group lacked a quorum. Barbara W. then made a motion to approve the minutes. Seth K. seconded the motion. All responded in favor of accepting the minutes and they were approved. The June meeting notes did not have to be approved because the group lacked a quorum.

**Treasurer's Report** – Barbara W. informed the group that the Downtown Great Barrington Cultural District (DGTB CD) had earned income for the fiscal year of \$10,855 and had budgeted expenses approved by the committee of \$10,815. Laura B. confirmed that the group had kept to its planned expenditures as stated originally to MCC in its application and no funds required redirection. Chris R. stated that the group still has \$4.8K available for the Lamppost Banner Project and for the group's contribution to ArtWeek advertising, which will likely be less than anticipated. There is not likely to be money for new projects. Chris R. re-did the report as requested at the last meeting to ensure it was clearly understood by attendees. Karin W. asked that Barbara W. share the report with others, which she agreed to do.

**Berkshire Busk Update** – Seth K. updated the group about the first weekend of the event which was rained out, and although he was out-of-town, Ed A. spoke with the organizer who was happy with the results. Ed A. confirmed that that north side of Main Street was empty because stores were closed at that hour but that there were visitors in front of performers on the south side of the street, that music could be heard on both sides of the street in a non-intrusive way, and that performers were appreciated by standing and sitting audiences. Gene is now tweaking locations and hours to find the right mix. Karin W. shared her experience seeing the event and noted that even people who live above Main Street have found the experience positive. Jeff C. allowed the musicians to come inside 20 Railroad Street Pub when rain started, and people continued to enjoy music there. Karin W. commented on the success of Berkshire Busk's social media. *Later in the meeting, Jeff C. noted that he offered discounts for performers who played during Berkshires Busk and suggested that participating artists during ArtWeek be able to access a similar benefit to help make downtown Great Barrington a place that artists want to congregate.*

**Lamppost Banners Project** – Richard L. is making mechanicals for the lamppost banner templates that will be sent to Larkin but has not yet received all the artwork from Neel W. He has one-third of the templates completed so far and five banners have not yet been while new designers are identified. Richard L. showed the group sample templates created for Railroad Street and Main Street. He is waiting on word regarding the exact placement of banners. The likely positioning will be rectangular banners on Railroad Street and square banners on Main Street. Richard will reconfirm in person. The templates are colorful and the background color for the theme and website match the blue in the DGTB CD logo. Chris R. expressed his appreciation about how well the project has been handled by the sub-committee. The banners will be put up in coordination with the town on or around September 8-15 after the Berkshire Film Festival's banners, which are placed up in mid-August. Richard L. will put all completed banners in a Google folder for group viewing and proofing once he is done.

**Website Updating** – Chris R. provided an updated list of businesses to Silo Media for the website following Madison B.'s review of properties opened and closed. Those businesses have now been changed on the website. Also updated on the website are the group's logo and colors, new committee members, and the Google map. The DGTB CD event calendar button now links to the events tab of the DGTB CD Facebook page. Other organizations and agencies can tag the DGTB CD and/or ask the group to co-host events. Laura B. reminded the group that they previously decided that this would be the best way to remind the DGTB CD to promote other groups' events. Ed A. asked if the Facebook logo could be changed from the old to the new one, which Laura B. said she could do.

**Dylan Kubis Photographer** – Jeff G. shared with the group the work of Dylan Kubis. Dylan is a local photographer who has Down syndrome and was recently featured on the front cover of the *Artful Mind*. He has a new business offering his photography services to local businesses and realtors; his father teaches at CADA. Jeff G. spoke with Dylan's father to confirm interest in the project with positive response. Jeff G. shared his Instagram and social media pages are popular. Dylan and his father counted 107 storefronts that could be photographed and proposed a quote of \$350 to 500 not-to-exceed for their services. The work was likely to take a few days. Laura B. confirmed the group has enough in its budget to cover this expenditure. Karin W. suggested that the group narrow down the list of cultural assets to be photographed. Ed A. made a motion following discussion that the group authorize hiring Dylan Kubis to take photographs to update the website at the rate quoted. Robin H. seconded. Chris R. will share an updated business list with him and send Jeff G. the photo specs. Silo Media asked they use. Laura B. suggested that Dylan also take general streetscape photographs, especially of people engaged in activities downtown.

**Berkshire County Cultural District Collaborations: ArtWeek Berkshires, Sept. 16-26, 2021**– ArtWeek Berkshires is slated for September 21-26. The project is a collaboration among the five cultural districts of Berkshire County, which are partnering with each other and 1Berkshire to help promote the county-wide event. The event presents an opportunity to raise awareness about individual artists, organizations, and more. Shows, demonstrations, open studios, in-person, and virtual events are all encouraged. Laura B. shared two Great Barrington organizations/stores that had registered, including Robin's Candy. Robin H. stated she felt ArtWeek Berkshires was

relevant to any business and gave examples of what she is doing, and others can do (e.g., artists' favorite candy, movie, etc.), to encourage people to visit their stores. Abi R. suggested that perhaps groups could work together on a communal project so that no group must on its own promote and market an event, especially at the end of a busy season. Laura B. explained that people can go to the ArtWeek landing page to see what is scheduled to avoid competition. The first week is Art Walk in Lenox and the last is Fresh Grass in North Adams. The goal is to make the 10 days feel vibrant with a range of activity. Robin H. suggested a scavenger hunt or passport or token to encourage families to participate (i.e., children/youth get a sticker for going to various events with papers turned in at the final venue). Elizabeth A. agreed this could be worth doing and that coordinating the outcome (i.e., mailing paper in, handing it to someone, etc.) needed to be organized. Elizabeth A. asked if a flyer was created yet. Laura B. noted a full-page ad would be placed in *Berkshire Magazine* and three billboards in Southern, Central, and Northern Berkshire County. *Berkshire Magazine* and Lamar are both sponsors. The *Berkshire Edge* will also have a promotion. A poster or flyer, not yet decided, will be the outcome following these marketing/advertising elements. Staff from the Lenox Chamber is handling the graphic design, which Laura B. will share once completed.

**Annual Report due to MCC by August 1** – Laura B. shared the process of creating the annual report to MCC. The report addresses how the DGTB CD expended funds, accomplishments achieved, and initial goals for the following year without a firm budget or programs yet determined. Laura B. shared the draft report, which stays relatively the same year to year and includes list of CD contacts, how decisions are made, and more. FY21 accomplishments include: 1) continued to recruit steering committee members; 2) expanded awareness through additional marketing such as the lamppost banner project, and 3) increased awareness of individual artists through activities such as Berkshire Busk. FY21 money (\$7.5K) may or may not be the same next year; expenditures also account for BRPC's staff time. There were no additional corporate sponsorships or earned income this year. Fifteen retailers or organizations opened in FY21 and six closed. Those will be tracked going forward as part of monthly meetings as a brief agenda item. While initially Laura B. assumed a 90% reduction of in-person visitation to downtown GB (e.g., foot traffic, cultural activities) in the last 12 months, after discussion the group felt a more accurate number was 40%. Ed A. and others noted it would be important in another part of the narrative to clarify that the decrease was not across the board and that, in some cases, restaurants and retailers saw more visitation due to new home purchases, more visitors, etc. Karin W. concurred that while large cultural institutions like the Mahaiwe shut down during the pandemic, the downtown atmosphere remained alive and vibrant, even last summer shortly after the pandemic began. Abi R. shared that the current atmosphere is quite busy, in fact, especially at restaurants. Karin W. suggested that the narrative state clearly the difference between the pre- and post-pandemic atmosphere as well as large institutions versus activity/downtown engagement. Karin W. stated that the Town government viewing the cultural life of downtown as central to the Great Barrington identity ("a mecca") is one of the distinguishing characteristics that sets the town apart. Laura B. stated she would add these comments to the report.

The five draft goals for FY22 include: 1) increase support of individual artists; 2) improve onboarding of new CD members; 3) support collaborations w/other cultural districts such as through ArtWeek; 4) ensure consistent communications across social media and similar channels; and 5) redirect and connect with stakeholders to increase engagement. The three cultural

activities for FY22 include the Berkshire Film Festival, ArtWeek Berkshires, and Berkshire Busk. Last year's festivals included Festival Latino and the W.E.B. Dubois Festival. Seth K. confirmed that Festival Latino is confirmed for September 25, 2021, during ArtWeek. Laura B. explained about the reporting requirements in the report that are from the NEA. For the # of total projected adults and youth engaged and artists involved, Laura B. has engaged with key DGTB CD members to fill-in numbers and will be tracking how #s were derived to assist with reporting for the following year. Elizabeth A. will also share her estimate regarding attendees for virtual events to help fill out data. Laura B. will continue to reach out to DGTB CD members for information not yet collected.

**Cultural District Annual Meeting September or October?** – No decision was made about this subject at this meeting due to a lack of time to discuss. This topic will be at the top of the agenda for the August meeting. The group will Google Doodle poll a date for that meeting before August 19th. Robin H. suggested inviting the organizers of Berkshire Busk to attend the October Annual Meeting due to their close tracking of attendee information. Karin W. concurred that gathering data consistently from year to year will be helpful to multiple parties.

**Adjourn** - The meeting adjourned at 9:46 a.m.

**Next meeting:** Thursday, August 19, 2021, at 9:00 a.m. via Zoom.